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**OPENING STATEMENT BY U.S. SENATOR CHUCK HAGEL NATIONAL TOWN HALL  
MEETING ON METH  
Bipartisan forum to address dangers and seek solutions to halt killer drug pandemic**

WASHINGTON, DC - I would like to thank Senators Coleman and Burns for organizing this Town Hall Meeting exploring the damage that methamphetamine is doing to our states and our country. I am an original cosponsor of The Combat Meth Act, which would restrict the sale of chemicals used in the production of meth as well as provide additional funding for education and law enforcement and federal prosecutors. According to an editorial in yesterday's Omaha World Herald, Nebraska's methamphetamine law, which puts medicines containing meth precursor chemicals behind the counter, is working. Since the law was passed four months ago, the number of meth labs seized by law enforcement authorities has fallen from 103 between September and December 2004 to 22 during this same period in 2005. This represents a decrease of 79 percent. Congress must pass comprehensive meth legislation that addresses education, prevention, enforcement, and treatment efforts at the state and local levels.

I have met with numerous local law enforcement officers in Nebraska over the years, visited drug courts, and have seen first hand how meth is impacting our communities and the devastating effect it has on meth users and their families. A study published last month by the University of Nebraska at Omaha put the meth epidemic in perspective. The study estimated that in 1992, approximately 88 Nebraskans were admitted to meth treatment programs; by 2003, this number increased nearly twenty-fold to 1,721 Nebraskans. Moreover, in 2003 there were over 20,000 Nebraskans needing treatment for meth abuse that were not getting it. On top of this, the Drug Enforcement Agency reports that more than 900 meth labs have been seized in Nebraska since 2000. We must come together as communities, states, and nationally to put a stop to the destructive force of meth. Today's Town Hall Meeting is important in helping raise public awareness of the scope of the meth threat to our communities.

I would like to thank Attorney General Gonzalez and National Drug Control Policy Director Walters for joining us for this meeting. Their continued leadership on this issue is essential to fighting the meth epidemic and making sure communities and local law enforcement agencies have the tools they need to stop this epidemic.

Finally, I would like to thank today's panelists for their contributions. In particular, John McVay, Deputy Administrator of the Nebraska Division of Behavioral Health. Their first hand experience is essential to understanding both the successes and failures of our anti-meth programs. Again, thank you all for being here and I look forward to hearing your views on what more must done to address the growing threat of meth abuse.

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